



LEWIS & CLARK CITY-COUNTY Health Department

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NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Residents Encouraged to Switch Gears, Accelerate Health in May

HELENA – Lewis and Clark County, in partnership with local groups and businesses, has organized a month-long effort to encourage people to find healthier ways to travel around town.

Entitled “Switching Gears,” the initiative will take place throughout the month of May. It will include safety education, special events, and fun incentives for people who actively commute by walking, bicycling, riding the bus, or carpooling.

The purpose of the initiative is two-fold: to encourage individual health through physical activity and to improve community health by reducing traffic and vehicle emissions.

“Healthy communities are those that give us opportunities to incorporate physical activity into our daily lives,” said Gail Beckner, health education specialist with the Lewis and Clark City-County Health Department. “Studies show that people who walk or bicycle to work, school, or businesses have healthier lifestyles and lower rates of obesity.”

Several local businesses will offer discounts and other incentives to residents who “commute another way in May.” Participants also will be encouraged to log the miles they travel using alternative methods.

Some of the Switching Gears events include:

- **Commuter Challenge.** Friends and co-workers can register a team with Big Sky Cycling and Fitness and log the miles they walk or cycle to become eligible to win prizes. The business also will offer free bike safety checks all month.
- **Bike Safety Class.** Sgt. McGee from the Helena Police Department will offer tips on safely traveling roadways by bicycle on May 4.

- **Recycle Your Cycle.** The Helena Safe Routes to School Committee will host a bicycle swap, especially for youth who've outgrown their bikes, on May 7.
- **Switch Gears with a Celebrity.** The public is invited to join Mayor Jim Smith and County Commissioner Derek Brown (on May 13) and Carroll College football coach Mike Van Diest (on May 20) in a short but active commute through town.
- **TAWSE Bike to Work Day.** The Try Another Way State Employees (TAWSE) group will host displays and vendors in the Capitol rotunda on May 13. Prizes, food, and safety training sessions are also included.
- **Ales for Trails.** Narrate Church is organizing a fundraiser on May 20 with proceeds going to the Friends of the Centennial Trail. The event at the Lewis and Clark County Fairgrounds will include live music and locally produced ales.
- **Centennial Trail Tour.** The Helena Non-motorized Travel Advisory Council will host a bicycle and walking tour for people of all ages on May 22.

Switching Gears business sponsors are the Bagel Company, Big Dipper Ice Cream, Big Sky Cycling and Fitness, Blackfoot River Brewery, Coffee Shack, Coney Island, Firetower Coffee, General Mercantile, Great Divide Cyclery, Melaque, Montana Outdoor Sports, Murry's Deli, No Sweat Cafe, Painted Pot, Park Avenue Bakery, Quarry Bar and Grill, Starbucks, Taco del Sol, Tread Lightly, Vanilla Bean, and The Windbag.

The sponsors will offer special deals on certain days of the month to those who actively commute.

For more information, including a full calendar of events and incentive offers, visit switchinggears Helena.blogspot.com or contact Gail Beckner at 457-8924 or Laura Erikson at 447-8383.

The Lewis & Clark City-County Health Department's mission is to improve and protect the health of all Lewis & Clark County residents.

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